



# NEWS

From County Supervisor Paul Biane

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2005

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## **Supervisors Expand Efforts to Recoup Cost of Illegal Immigration**

SAN BERNARDINO -The Board of Supervisors took another step on Tuesday to ensure San Bernardino County is reimbursed for the millions of dollars it must spend on illegal immigrants.

The Board ratified an application for reimbursement submitted by Arrowhead Regional Medical Center Director June Griffith-Collison earlier this month. The Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 includes up to \$250 million a year for the next four years to help hospitals pay for emergency medical costs associated with undocumented immigrants. California is expected to receive about \$71 million from the entire pot of money.

Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (AMRC) spends about \$1 million annually to provide emergency room care to illegal immigrants. Federal law precludes hospitals from refusing to treat anyone who comes to an emergency room seeking help. Failure to provide care can result in federal fines. Because of this requirement, illegal immigrants often use the ER as their first and only form of health care

“Until now, the County has bared this burden alone,” Supervisor Biane said. “By tapping this federal reimbursement program, the County can hopefully recoup millions in uncompensated health care costs over the next four years.”

AMRC staff will not ask patients directly about their citizenship status. Instead, staff will ask patients for their Social Security numbers, passports and insurance information. Staff will consider the answers given when deciding whether to classify a patient as an illegal immigrant.

“We do not want to deter anyone from seeking necessary medical treatment,” Supervisor Biane said. “We simply want to make sure we are appropriately reimbursed by the federal government for treating uninsured, illegal immigrants.”

University Medical Center in Tucson Arizona has been collecting patients’ immigration information for two decades, and illegal immigrants continue to seek treatment at the hospital, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. In 2003, the hospital spent \$6 million to treat illegal immigrants. In 2004, that uncompensated figure rose to \$12 million.

In addition to supporting the application for reimbursement, Supervisor Biane also asked Behavioral Health, Public Health and AMRC officials to meet and devise a way to track uncompensated costs for all health care rendered to illegal immigrants.

“I plan on making sure San Bernardino County gets every penny it deserves for services rendered to people in this country illegally,” Supervisor Biane said. “If the federal government cannot keep illegal immigrants out, it certainly must assist local governments like San Bernardino County that are financially impacted.”

Last week, the Board of Supervisors appropriated funding for a program that will help the County secure more federal reimbursement for detaining undocumented immigrants arrested for crimes. Currently, many illegal immigrants are released from jail before federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers can properly document them.

Through the new program, ICE officers will train Sheriff’s custody specialists how to identify and properly document illegal immigrants. By doing this, the County can request the appropriate amount of reimbursement from the federal government. The Sheriff’s Department estimates it costs the County about \$11 million a year to detain illegal immigrants.